VSFS

VIRTUAL STUDENT FEDERAL SERVICE

STUDENT HANDBOOK

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Welcome to the Virtual Student Federal Service (VSFS)! Up to 5,000 U.S. citizen college students apply for VSFS internships annually and up to 50 agencies participate. Congratulations on your selection from a highly competitive field.

Your interest in public service is inspiring. You are now joining the ranks of more than 10,000 VSFS interns who have advanced the work of the federal government since Former Secretary Hillary Clinton launched the program in 2009. VSFS was part of a growing effort by the U.S. Department of State to harness technology and a commitment to global service among young people to facilitate new forms of diplomatic engagement.

"Working from college and university campuses, American students will partner with our embassies abroad to conduct digital diplomacy that reflects the realities of the networked world," Former Secretary Clinton said when unveiling VSFS during a May 2009 New York University commencement speech.

VSFS has come a long way since 44 in-person summer interns agreed to continue working for the Department, albeit virtually, for the 2009-2010 school year, and we cannot wait to hear about your contributions this school year. Please email us about your successes at VSFS@state.gov or tag us on LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram.

Getting Started

Hi, my name is...

Even though your mentor/Intern Supervisor reviewed your resume and statement of interest, it might be worthwhile to talk to your mentors and find out more about them, as well as share some more personal information about yourself, before beginning work on your project.

For example, you could ask:

- How did you choose your career?
- What did you major in during college/grad school?
- What are your career goals?

Who knows - you might have more in common than you know!
Note: Some of our past interns submitted video introductions.

(Great) Expectations

As you get started, make sure to share expectations about what you hope to achieve through your experience with your mentor/supervisors. They will have expectations for you, too. Being open, honest, and clear from the get-go establishes a good rapport.

Here are a few things you may want to discuss:

- Class schedule, midterm and final dates, breaks;
- How and when you'll check-in with each other (by phone, email, Skype, Google Hangout, digital video conference (DVC), etc. and weekly/bi-weekly).
- Your available resources (personal laptop, computer programs, camera, library, tools, etc.) and anything else you might need
- How you'll communicate apart from regular check-ins - Slack, email, phone, Google docs, Basecamp, Trello, etc.

Time Commitment

Remind them that you are volunteering ten hours per week on your internship, so they can plan work for you accordingly. If you find you can handle additional work, let them know. Conversely, if you find that you don't have enough time to fulfill all of your internship work - for example, you can manage one blog post, but not two posts per month, talk with your supervisors about it.

If you have not heard from your mentor/supervisor within the first few weeks of your scheduled start date, contact the VSFS team at VSFS@state.gov.

VSFS Standard Timeline

1. **APRIL**
   Students can apply to VSFS projects on USAJOBS
2. **MAY-JUNE**
   Supervisors review applications and make selections
3. **JULY**
   Selected students are notified and accept their project(s)
4. **SEPTEMBER**
   Internships begin
5. **EARLY DECEMBER**
   Mid-year check-in
6. **EARLY APRIL**
   End-of-year evaluation
7. **MAY**
   Internships conclude

Working Remotely

Communication is key - really it is.

Communication is vital to the success of an internship. Because remote teams lack daily face-to-face contact, it is important that you remain in regular virtual contact with your supervisors/mentors. Work with them to set up weekly check-in calls.

Try your best to respond to emails/communication within 24 hours. You and your mentor should discuss these kinds of expectations early in your internship.

Be sure to consider time differences. To avoid any confusion when scheduling calls, use a time zone converter such as *http://timeanddate.com/worldclock* and be sure to indicate the time zone associated with the time of scheduled communication.

NOTE: If at any point in your internship you have problems reaching your mentor(s), please email the *VSFS team (vsfs@state.gov)* so they can resolve the issue.

Establishing a Schedule

Flexibility

A virtual internship gives you a lot of flexibility in setting your own schedule, but that means that it can be easy to get distracted from completing things on time. To ensure that the team is making the most of your experience and your time, consider these recommendations:

Keep a Schedule

Because you are working virtually, it is especially important for you to complete tasks and projects on time. Keeping to a schedule will help you stay organized and keep you on track. Chunk out times each week when you can focus on your VSFS work.

Have a Dedicated Work Space

Just like for your school work, your work environment is key to your success as an intern. So this is another chance to get your work area in order for both your academics and the internship.

Constant Communication

Working from a distance means that communication is particularly important. Stay in constant communication with your supervisor/mentor with updates about your progress and to stay connected with other things going on in your office. There may be times when you or your supervisor/mentor are not able to be in touch and alerting each other ahead of time to reschedule will help ensure that you get the most out of your experience.

How Am I Doing?

Requesting Feedback

Don't be afraid to ask for feedback from your mentor/supervisor, both on the work you submit and in your performance overall. As an Intern, you are here to learn as much as you are here to work.

After you submit a project or complete a task, ask questions such as: Was that what you were looking for? Is the format correct? How can this be improved? If there are revisions, offer to make them yourself or, if your supervisor/mentor makes them, ask to see what was changed to give you an opportunity to learn and develop a better sense of what to do moving forward.

Remember, sometimes government and academic terms and lingo can mean something different to each group. Double check with your supervisor/mentor if you’re not sure!

The VSFS team will be reaching out a couple times during the year, suggesting mid-year and end-of-the-year evaluations for both students and supervisors/mentors.

Keep Track of Your Experience

Consider keeping a journal that documents the tasks you've completed and the projects you've worked on each week. At the end or in the middle of your internship, your mentor may ask you for a list of your accomplishments.

If you want to request a letter of recommendation from your mentor at a later date, a short summary of your work to refresh their memory will be helpful. Connecting with your mentor on LinkedIn is a great way to stay in touch and is another way your supervisor can vouch for your abilities.

In addition, your journal of your VSFS experience will be helpful when you are putting your internship on your resume, in order to remind you of specific accomplishments to highlight.

Your school may also require documentation of your work to earn internship credit.

When you list your VSFS experience on your resume, we recommend using a format similar to this:

Virtual Student Federal Service (VSFS) Intern
Name of the Agency/Organization [U.S. Department of State, NASA, etc.]
September 2022 - May 2023 (or other end date), 10 hours per week
Unpaid, volunteer work

Participation Verification

In the future, if you are undergoing a background check for future employment or other participation verification, please list your experience as “Virtual Student Federal Service (VSFS)” with VSFS@state.gov as the email address and “U.S. Department of State” as the official agency.

The physical address is "2201 C St. NW, Washington D.C. 20520”.

Making it Count - Academic Credit

Many colleges and universities allow students to pursue academic credit for internships, including virtual internships! To find out more about this process, speak with your academic advisor and/or your school’s career center to find out what forms and requirements are needed.

The Virtual Intern Awards (VIAS)

And keep in mind the Virtual Intern Awards (the VIA's)! Our very own version of the Oscars launched in 2021. Three students were named as Interns of the year. Students can nominate mentors to be the Mentor of the Year as well.

OTHER OPPORTUNITIES TO CONSIDER

You may be eligible for federal internships and job opportunities through the Pathways and other student programs.

For more information:
https://www.usajobs.gov/Help/working-in-government/unique-hiring-paths/students/

Contact Information

Contact the VSFS team at *vsfs@state.gov* and follow us on social media:

@VSFSatState

@VSFSatState

@VSFSatState

https://www.linkedin.com/showcase/usdos-vsfs