



## Key Distinguishers for Virtual Paid Work Experiences May 2020

Over the last year, in an effort to identify and elevate the core components of successful work-based learning, HERE to HERE has developed [Key Distinguishers](#) for four areas in which the work takes place: *high schools, post-secondary programs, paid work experiences*, and *employers*. The Key Distinguishers were informed by a review of relevant literature and a design-based, iterative research process that leveraged the experiences and expertise of various stakeholders – including students, work-based learning coordinators, teachers, intermediary organizations, and employers – in existing programs.

The Key Distinguishers were designed as a tool to guide work-based learning practice and assessment. Today, with the COVID-19 pandemic endangering, if not already eliminating, many of the work-based learning opportunities available to young people over the summer, we have created a set of Key Distinguishers for **Virtual Paid Work Experiences**.

HERE to HERE believes it is critical that young people have access to career awareness and exploration, professional networking, personal development, and skill building opportunities that internships and other work-based learning experiences can provide. During a time of great uncertainty, when young people have been forced to disengage with so many things in their lives, virtual internships represent a way to ensure that students aren't forsaking valuable developmental opportunities over the summer as a result of the pandemic.

Our hope is that this document can provide intermediary and provider organizations, as well as employers and community-based organizations who are hosting interns, with a better understanding of the considerations necessary to successfully implement meaningful virtual work-based learning programs. While virtual experiences are being increasingly looked at to combat the restrictions in place amid the ongoing public health crisis, it is possible that they will become a viable alternative to traditional placements even after a return to normal. This makes it all the more important that virtual experiences are held to the same standard, and provide the same benefits, as in-person experiences.

To learn more about HERE to HERE and Key Distinguishers, visit [www.heretohere.org](http://www.heretohere.org).



The Key Distinguishers for Virtual Paid Work Experiences are grouped into four categories:

1. **Resources** - students should have reliable access to all necessary technology and internships should feature advising and other supports to help students succeed
2. **Connections** - experiences should be linked to classroom learning and/or student interests, and foster social and professional relationships
3. **Relevance** - assigned projects should result in work that is of value to the employer and/or community and helps students build meaningful skills
4. **Takeaways** - work experiences should be paid, offer credits or certifications, and lay the foundation for future roles

### **Resources**

*Young people have reliable access to technology, including computers, high-speed Internet, and any necessary software/hardware*

A lack of necessary technology should not prohibit any young person from participating and succeeding in a virtual experience. Young people should receive free access to computers, high-speed Internet, and any other necessary software and hardware. This access should be portable, in the event the young person is in an unstable housing situation.

*Young people receive training on digital tools and working remotely*

In addition to having access to necessary technology, young people should receive training on how to use the digital tools that will be necessary for a particular work experience and the world of work more broadly. Young people should also be provided with resources that will help them get accustomed to virtual work norms and best practices.

*Young people receive access to targeted resources to address challenges and inequities that may prevent success in their work experience and in the labor market*

Those implementing virtual experiences should be able to direct young people to resources that are not directly related to challenges they may be facing in the virtual classroom or workplace, such as food insecurity or housing instability. There are a range of obstacles that young people may be facing that could present barriers to their success in a work-based learning experience and in the labor market broadly. Stakeholders should work with young people to mitigate these challenges.

*Students have flexibility with work plans and schedules*

Virtual experiences should provide flexibility for students to work on projects and separately develop and learn new skills (upskilling). Additionally, with respect to scheduling, there should be more of a focus on the completion of specific projects and goals rather than how much time is spent “on the job.” Some expectations and guidelines may be set around which hours of the day young people are expected to be online, and how many hours they are expected to work independently.



## **Connections**

*Experience is connected to classroom learning and/or student interests*

Virtual experiences should help students expand skills related to what they are learning in the classroom and/or their areas of interest. This can be driven by a young person's interest in a particular subject in school, extracurricular activity, or other means for a young person's preferences to be stated (i.e. survey, assessment, or one-on-one conversation).

*Young people are provided with regular opportunities - at least once a week - to interact with peers and industry professionals.*

Virtual experiences should foster collaboration and the formation of both social and professional networks. When possible, young people should begin their experience as part of a cohort with whom they work together on projects and collectively participate in other online activities and experiences. Young people should also have virtual exposure to a variety of professionals, careers, and worksites. These activities and experiences should be supported and facilitated by a staff member from either a CBO or employer.

*Young people receive frequent, one-on-one advising from a coach or mentor*

Young people in virtual experiences should have a dedicated coach or mentor – separate from their supervisor – with whom they can connect - on at least a weekly basis - for any issues that may arise. The coach/mentor should have regular check-ins with the young person to make sure the needs of both the young person and employer are being met. Coaches/mentors will ideally come from a similar background, and understand the young person's community and cultural norms. Coaches/mentors should receive appropriate training for this role.

## **Relevance**

*Experiences should be part of a young person's career exploration*

Virtual work experiences should provide young people with resources and opportunities to learn about fields of work and help them determine their interest and aptitude for roles within a given industry.

*Young people are learning skills and competencies that will prepare them for future work and a career*

Young people should acquire a wide range of skills that will benefit them in finding and succeeding in other employment opportunities. This ranges from soft skills, including effective communication, email etiquette, etc. to hard skills, including the use of certain types of software and other workplace tools.

*Young people are engaging in meaningful work that provides value to the young person, employer, and/or community*

Young people will ideally engage in work that addresses real challenges faced by employers or their community. This could include short-term projects (or micro-internships) and research projects that respond to a range of needs. Students may also participate in relevant training,



upskilling, or educational activities that aid in their personal, professional, or academic development.

### **Takeaways**

*Experience leads to a portable high school or postsecondary credit or credential that is recognized across the industry and/or work that students can capture for Capstone projects, portfolios, etc.*

Ideally, all virtual experiences will ultimately result in young people being able to acquire a high school or postsecondary credit that will count toward graduation across educational institutions, or an industry recognized credential that confers mastery of a set of skills and competencies. However, if this is not possible, industry certifications should be available for students who complete relevant training. Additionally, students should be able to capture their work for use in Capstone projects, portfolios, etc.

*Virtual experiences are paid and are of sufficient duration for young people to meet personal, professional, or academic goals*

When interning for employers, students should be paid the minimum wage whenever possible. For other types of work-based learning experiences, a stipend that may not result in the hourly minimum wage being paid can be substituted. Experiences should engage youth for at least 70 hours over the course of at least four weeks.