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FAQs: COVID-19 Coronavirus & Project SEARCH Program Sites

The Project SEARCH National Office has received questions and information about the impact of the COVID-19 coronavirus on some of our program sites.

- The Steering Committee for each Project SEARCH program site should discuss and make the best decisions for their site in regards to COVID-19 based on:
  - Federal, state, and local rules and guidance
  - Policies of the host business and each partner organization
  - Individual needs of student interns (if possible)
- The purpose of this FAQ document is to summarize questions and information shared by our network of Project SEARCH sites across the globe. Please continue to reach out to us at projectsearch@cchmc.org to share questions and information from your site. We will continue to update this document as there is more information to share!
- Teams are also sharing resources and ideas in the "P.S. Let's Chat" section of the Project SEARCH Member Portal. We have created a "COVID-19" topic to house these threads.

Questions	Info for Steering Committees to Consider

How do we learn more about VocFit? (Topic added 3/27, Updated 3/30/2020)	• Dennis Cleary, co-creator of VocFit (www.vocfit.com), is hosting 2 live webinars (same topic). They will be on **April 1st and April 3rd at 12 PM (Eastern Time)**. See our member portal for more details.
	  ○ 4/1st VocFit for Project SEARCH webinar:
	  ▪ Time: 12:00 PM (Eastern Time) - Live!
	  ▪ Click: https://iu.zoom.us/j/344348448
	  ▪ Meeting ID: 344 348 448
	  ○ 4/3rd VocFit for Project SEARCH webinar:
	  ▪ Time: 12:00 PM (Eastern Time) - Live!
	  ▪ Click: https://iu.zoom.us/j/768694220
	  ▪ Meeting ID: 768 694 220
	• VocFit has a number of tools that can help support your Project SEARCH team. The new updates and tools are perfect for tele-education. This is a great time to develop new skills and learn to use this tool.
	  ○ Learn how to use VocFit to support your interns this year and to plan for employment after graduation.
	  ○ Discuss how to use VocFit to supplement skills assessment days for sites not able to do this in person this year.

	• The VocFit team at Colorado State University is also increasing their 'office hours' to provide 1:1 training as needed so that sites can get on VocFit.com and learn to use it as part of their regular practice.

What can Skills Trainers and Job Developers do during this time? (Topic added 3/24, Updated 3/27/2020)	Note: Many state VR agencies are putting out guidance on this. Please check their websites and contact their office with questions.
	
	Some thoughts:
	• Check with each intern's team members. For those that are ready, begin working on job development
	  ○ Some sites have reported that interns are doing online interviews during this time. Some companies that are under COVID-19 restrictions are providing a letter of commitment stating that they will be hiring the intern after their restrictions are lifted.
	  ○ Many state and local VR agencies are encouraging taking jobs with companies that need immediate employees now (such as hospitals, grocery stores and drug stores). If this doesn't match the intern's job goal, they will support efforts to secure another job later.
	  ○ If an intern gets a job but the new employer doesn't want a skills trainer/job coach present because of COVID-19, consider creative ways to deliver job coaching (FaceTime/phone app, other visual prompts or cues, alarms, texts, etc.).
	• Many state and local VR agencies are looking for creative ways to deliver Pre-ETS programming now and this summer. They are looking into virtual and small group classes. Help the team explore if this an avenue to help current interns gain skills still needed.
	• Many VR agencies are promoting a virtual "Job Club" during this time to work on job development, interviews, on-line profiles, etc. Check with your local and state VR partners to see if this is a billable service.
	• Work on creating new internships and doing task analysis of existing internships with a renewed focus on

	quality, productivity, and layering of tasks during the internship. • Develop some creative accommodations and adaptations for skills that are difficult to teach. • If you aren't using VocFit, become familiar with this great tool that helps match interns to internships and interns to jobs! For more information on this evidence-based tool go to www.vocfit.com. After you register your site, you can build profiles of the internships and current interns. ○ Please see the question on VocFit for more info! • Check out PS Let's Chat for more ideas! • Redeploy any staff not needed during this time to other agency services.
What should we do about selecting interns for next year? (Prior topic, Updated 3/27/2020)	• If the team has completed the assessments, selection could be coordinated with partners via teleconference. • If assessment day has not yet occurred, and the host business is restricting visitors, the team could consider hosting a modified assessment day at the school (if and when it is open). Partners that can't attend can teleconference into selection discussions. • If it's not possible to do an in-person assessment, the team should consider options to interview applicants via teleconference or recorded video using standardized questions and rubric. • The team should also use VocFit as part of the assessment. The report can be sent to families and professionals that have worked with the intern to complete and send back. ○ Please see the question on VocFit for more info! • The selection can then take place with the team via teleconference. The team should be provided with applications, summary of documents gathered, interviews, VocFit assessments, and rubric prior to the selection meeting. • Please see P.S. Let's Chat for more ideas shared by sites!
Could a current Project SEARCH student return next year if the team thinks they need more internship experience to gain skills still needed?	• If the IEP team decides the student needs to return to the program, how long will they be in the program? Do they need the whole year, or just one more internship? If just one internship, could the returning student begin

(Topic added 3/24, Updated 3/27/2020)	their internship right away and skip the orientation period? Note: The IEP team and the student's local school district must agree.
	• Will VR help to fund the supported employment agency for the returning student/s?
	• Could anything be done over the summer for the student/s to gain needed skills?
	  ○ The last internship could be done over the summer if the host business agrees, if VR will fund it, and if liability and staffing are in place.
	  ○ There is Pre-ETS funding available and most state VR's are looking for ways to deliver it now and over the summer.

Have any teams shared resources they are using for online learning?
(Prior topic, Updated 3/25/2020)
	• Program sites should follow their school system's guidance on distance learning.
	• Most sites are engaging the students daily on school approved platforms like Schoology or Google Classroom.
	• Action plans are being created to address short term action items (What needs to be done now?), long term action items (What needs to be done to complete this academic year?), accomplishment, and concerns.
	• Project SEARCH has not vetted any resources, but will share resources that sites have chosen to use.
	  ○ Please visit P.S. Let's Chat for info and resources shared by sites- this is growing every day!
	  ○ Some sites are using the Conover Company's 24/7 cloud-based, integrated learning platform which includes modules on career exploration, social/emotional learning, soft skills, and life skills (https://www.conovercompany.com/). Prices range from $25-50 per module per person. Project SEARCH sites are being offered a 15% discount off these prices during this time. Contact Art Janowiak for more info: ajanowiak@conovercompany.com, 800-933-1933 x7852.

Our school is closed, can the deadline for outcome data entry be extended? (Prior topic, Updated 3/24/2020)	• We will not penalize any site for late data entry due to COVID-19 with regard to the Outcome Awards. • Regular reporting deadlines will still be listed for each site, but our database developers have opened up the

	data-entry lock-down. This means that you will still be able to enter your data after the deadline has passed for the 2018-2019 program graduates. • Please enter this data as soon as you can. Reach out to us if you need assistance.
If our interns can't return to the program site before the end of the year (due to school closure or request of the host business), can we say they completed the program? (Prior topic, Updated 3/24/2020)	• The general rule is that interns must successfully complete at least two full internships. Most interns have done this at this point. • The Steering Committee should consider each student on an individual basis to decide if their goals were met. • Some sites are looking at having interns complete summer internships. • Some sites are looking at bringing interns back for an internship next school year if needed.
Will the Project SEARCH Conference still take place? (Prior topic, Updated 3/24/2020)	• We have posted a Conference FAQ document on the conference page of our website (https://projectsearch.us/conference/). • We have extended Early Bird registration rates through 5/15/2020. We extended the conference abstract submission deadline through 4/30/2020. • We are actively planning a great summer conference in Baltimore for our Project SEARCH sites.
How do we report if program graduates or current interns that are employed are laid off due to COVID-19? (Topic added 3/19/2020)	• We added another option in the database under reason for job loss: Laid off due to COVID-19.
We have a new program site starting in 2020 or a major change (location, partner change, etc.) expected for our current program site for 2020. We are concerned we may not have enough time for planning and prep. Can our start date be extended? (Topic added 3/19/2020)	• Yes, we will be as flexible as we can be. Please contact your National Consultant to discuss this further. • For some new or changing sites, it may make sense to start later and complete two full internships versus three this upcoming year. • For some sites it may make sense to start later and continue the program past the typical end date. • There are a variety of things that need to be considered from the perspective of all partners. We are here to help your Steering Committee work through this!
Our state is on a hiring freeze, how do we reflect this in our employment outcomes? (Prior topic, Updated 3/19/2020)	• We understand that we could be heading into a tough time for job development. It's our hope that, because of the timing in relation to our reporting schedule, it will not have a large effect on outcomes.

	• The 2018-19 cohort of interns has, for the most part, already found employment or decided on an alternative activity. • The 2019-20 cohort will have a full 9 months for job development upon completion. Let's hope the slow-down in hiring is over before that period ends! • Some sites have reported that interns are doing online interviews during this time. Some companies are providing a letter of commitment stating that they will be hiring the intern after their COVID-19 restrictions are lifted. • We will continue to monitor this unprecedented and unpredictable situation and keep you updated on any changes. • Please share job development ideas on P.S. Let's Chat!

What do we do if the host business says Project SEARCH interns must leave? (Prior topic, Updated 3/19/2020)	• Remember, we are guests at the host business and must respect their decisions.
	• Ask if there is any opportunity for your student interns to remain on site and assist in the prevention and response efforts.
	• Ask if there are any job opportunities to assist in the prevention and response efforts (consider both current and prior interns still looking for jobs).
	• Verify how you will notify interns and families when the program can resume.
	• Discuss other options with the Steering Committee partners for this time. In addition to considering what skills could be learned and practiced, the team needs to discuss things such as staffing, transportation, and liability coverage.
	  ○ Discuss temporary opportunities to teach skills to all of the interns elsewhere (in another business setting or in the school setting).
	  ○ Discuss potential externships at various locations based on the goals of each intern.
	  ○ Increase job development efforts.
	  ○ Provide more of the curriculum during this time (and spend more time at internships if/when they are able to return to the program site).

	• Some sites are looking into summer internships for interns.
What do we do if our school closes? (Prior topic)	• If the school is closed the interns will not go to the host business. Some schools are moving toward online learning during this time. • Follow your communication plan. Ensure all partners, interns, and families are kept in the loop.
If the intern accepts this time-limited, paid job offer how do we report this in the Project SEARCH database? (Prior topic)	• This should be coded as non-seasonal employment, and the employment record should be updated to include the end date upon completion of the employment.
The host business has offered interns a time-limited, paid job to assist with the COVID-19 prevention and response. How does Project SEARCH National feel about this? (Prior topic)	• Can we just take a moment to say how cool it is that a major hospital site noticed the skillsets of our interns and how valuable they would be to their COVID-19 prevention and response efforts! • This is a great opportunity to use skills learned and gain experience that could lead to a permanent job. • VR may consider this a paid work experience. The intern should continue in the program during the paid work experience. This would allow the instructor and skills trainers to interact and assist as needed. The intern should continue to receive job development services.
How can we be proactive in addressing our role at the host business during this time? (Prior topic)	• Be aware of policies, procedures, and guidelines and ensure compliance. Document that interns are checked-off on related skills (such as hand hygiene and proper sanitation procedures). Proactively share this. • Ask the business liaison about discussing that the interns are students (not volunteers) with leadership. Ask about expectations of other student groups during this time. • Discuss the skillsets of the interns. Be willing to adjust or drop their current internships if needed. Suggest ways they could contribute to the prevention and response efforts and still learn and practice marketable skills. • Plan and prep for possible transition with the interns and their families.
How can we ensure we stay up to date on how COVID-19 may impact the school, agency, and the host business? (Prior topic)	• Be sure that there is a solid communication plan between all partners.

	• If there are any task forces started to address this, see if a member of the Project SEARCH team can be a part of or connect in some way to this group.
Interns and families have questions about COVID-19. Where can I find reliable info to share? What do they need to know? (Prior topic)	• The CDC (https://www.cdc.gov/) is a reliable source. Their website has up-to-date information and handouts. • Schools, agencies, and businesses have policies, procedures, and guidelines to prevent and control the spread of infection and to prepare for and respond to an emergency. ○ Partners must share info for their organization and any updates timely with the whole team, including interns and their families. • They must also verify that they understand this teaching and know what to do.