Boston University School of Public Health
Practicum FAQ’s RELATED TO COVID-19

FOR STUDENTS CURRENTLY CONDUCTING PRACTICUMS

1. What if COVID-19 prevents my practicum from continuing (i.e. hours, deliverables, or changing/ending abruptly)? What if my ability to access needed information changes due to organizations implementing ‘social distancing’ strategies and employees are working remotely?

These are uncharted waters, and both CEPH and BUSPH understands that flexibility is needed while still ensuring that students gain fundamental public health competencies. To that end, practicums constrained by COVID-19 over this period of disruption, may apply these measures if needed.

If your deliverables have changed
Students are able to change competencies and deliverables from what was proposed. You may consider what intermediate work products you have already contributed, and recast them to serve as deliverables. Another possible deliverable option is to craft a well-developed reflection to meet some competencies.

If you have not (or will not) complete the 240-hour requirement – and – are unable to complete your practicum remotely

- If you have completed LESS than 120 hours, you will be required to submit 2 deliverables plus a reflection paper related to your practicum in some way, though your initial competencies may change.

- If you have completed MORE than 121 hours, you will be required to submit 2 deliverables and one of these may be a reflection paper related to your practicum in some way.

If you are volunteering to support public health response to COVID-19:

- Volunteer opportunities during this crisis situation, and the needs vary widely, from delivering food to families in need via Boston Medical Center to phone banking, contact tracing, communications support and more.

- How to submit to BUSPH Practicum Team:

  ▪ When you email sphpract@bu.edu to request a Practicum Portal account, please mention that you are seeking to use a volunteer position as a practicum.

  ▪ Once you have an account, add as much detail as you can in the Practicum Proposal description.

  ▪ Treat this as you would any other Practicum in terms of filling out the questions in the Portal.

  ▪ In this unprecedented time, if you are a “relief volunteer” for an organization, please use Ryan Wisniewski, Practicum Manager, as your Supervisor, ryanwis@bu.edu, 617-358-1829 in the Portal.
Proposing Deliverables as a Volunteer:

- You may opt to complete deliverables that relates to the work you are doing such as disaster response, addressing health equity issues, social services, mental health as it relates to isolation, etc. Or, you may opt to complete deliverables that is related to your career interests. Some examples are below.

  1. Annotated Literature Review
  2. Policy Memo
  3. Statistical Analysis Plan (using publicly available data)
  4. GIS Mapping
  5. Stakeholder Analysis
  6. Needs Assessment
  7. Communication Plan or Materials (such as public service announcement)
  8. Poster Presentation
  9. Other ideas are also encouraged

**As noted above:**

- If you have completed LESS than 120 hours, you will be required to submit 2 deliverables plus a reflection paper related to your practicum in some way, though your initial competencies may change.

- If you have completed MORE than 121 hours, you will be required to submit 2 deliverables and one of these may be a reflection paper related to your practicum in some way.

- **Note:** Reflection papers should be focused on volunteer activities in the context of public health in action.

If your Supervisor is unavailable to complete evaluations

Supervisors automatically receive reminders to review your work (generated from the Practicum Portal). Students must ask their Supervisor if they are still able to complete a review in the Portal. If not, students must note this when they are describing changes.

- If your Supervisor can not complete an evaluation via the Portal, they may be contacted by Boston University at a later date.

How to communicate your changes to the Practicum team

Communicate changes in the Practicum Portal either in the Midpoint Review or Final Review section, depending on what stage you are at in the Process.

- For changes in deliverables and/or competencies, use the “Did your Practicum Proposal Information change?” textbox as indicated below. (The screen capture is for the Midpoint Review, though the Final Review form is similar). Additionally, in this section, please let us know if your Supervisor can NOT complete your review.
- If your hours are off track, due to Covid-19, please explain why, and indicate how many hours you were able to complete, and whether you expect to be able to complete more.

2. Can I do my Practicum remotely?
   Yes. Completing some or all of your practicum hours remotely is possible, depending on the host organization and Supervisor. Those working remotely should develop a schedule and structure for how they will work and communicate with their Supervisor. (For example, work Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 8am-4pm, and speak with my supervisor weekly via Zoom/Skype. Send a summary of work activities at the end of each week.)

3. Due to COVID-19 my supervisor is no longer available to mentor me -- what should I do?
   Is there another person at the site, familiar with your efforts, who can stand in? If that is OK with your Supervisor, you can edit the Supervisor contact information in the Practicum Proposal section in the Portal. Once this is done, the new Supervisor can participate in the 3-step review and approval processes that takes place during the Proposal, Midpoint and Final Review stages.

4. I feel sick, but I know the organization is depending on me. Should I tell my supervisor?
   Yes! When you feel sick with a cold or flu like symptoms, it can be easy to transmit illness to others. It is best to do what you need to do recover and minimize transmission.
5. I feel at risk at my Practicum site -- should I ask to work from home? What if they say no? What if they put pressure on me to stay? If they say no, are there consequences if I chose to leave?
It is good to speak with your Supervisor to learn what is possible. Practicum Staff are also available to speak with you about your concerns. While not all practicum activities can be completed remotely, we want you to feel safe and follow reasonable guidelines.

6. My scope of work has changed and I’m not happy about it. What do I do?
Some like to say, the only constant is change. It’s a universal truth. Your ability to cope and adjust to change is an important quality, especially in times of change. But there are some things you can do: 1) Consider the big picture and whether the change is something in your control and what options you have, and 2) Speak with your Supervisor about the change and what might be possible to alter or mitigate its adverse effects. Change may not be easy, but communicating appropriately with your Supervisor is a key step to learning whether adjustments can be made. Practicum staff can help you clarify what is problematic, figure out what options you have, and what is your best approach.

7. My supervisor wants me on emergency preparedness and I want to say no, but I feel like I’m selling out. What should I do?
We want you to feel safe and to follow reasonable guidelines. Each individual will have their own sense for what is best for them, particularly in risky situations. Sharing your concerns may help you learn more to feel better about the situation or may also help you come to a decision you want to make. Reach out to Practicum Staff to discuss your individual situation.

8. I am a part-time student working in public health. I would like to complete my practicum at my current employer. I am worried that I won’t be able to find a project that is unrelated to my “day job”. What are my options?

During this time of COVID-19, BUSPH understands that flexibility is needed now more than ever for part-time working students in addition to the potential for remote practicum opportunities. A few scenarios are below:

- If your day-to-day work has been changed to involve COVID-19 related efforts, that can be counted as a Practicum.
- If your day-to-day work has NOT changed, but it is inappropriate to inquire about a new project with your current employer, please contact the Practicum team (sphpract@bu.edu) to discuss ways to make this work as a Practicum.
- If your circumstance varies from these above, please contact the Practicum team (sphpract@bu.edu) to discuss in more detail.

FOR STUDENTS LOOKING FOR PRACTICUMS

1. What if COVID-19 prevents me from finding a Practicum and my graduation timeline is put at risk?
As we are learning from news reports, COVID-19 is disrupting all kinds of things: from big events and conferences, School classes, professional and personal life activities, not to mention the upheaval of being impacted from the disease, restrictions, and possibly self-quarantine, etc. What we do know is that organizations run on people and public health agencies are busy at work to help address many issues. Many still need and want interns. We continue to post opportunities and foster ways to connect to organizations, through remote meeting options, (see in Handshake) so you can learn about their opportunities. We think it will still be possible for many to keep their timelines. But given the state of disruption, some timeline adjustments may be required.
2. Due to COVID-19 I have decided to go home, which is not in Boston. How should I go about finding a Practicum in a different state?
   Searching for a Practicum outside of Boston is no different than searching for a Practicum in Boston – the tools and methods are still the same. Students do their Practicum in many cities and states, and even remotely. Connecting with alumni on LinkedIn and using the Past Practicum Database will be an important step in connecting with organizations in your area as well as Indeed, LinkedIn & Handshake job boards. In addition, we also have additional resources in the Career Library such as organizations in the Major U.S. cities.

3. How long should I wait for what I really want vs. what is available?
   This question is common, even during “normal” times. Some sectors and organizations move more slowly than others. We encourage you to reach out to Practicum Staff to discuss.

4. Everything I’m seeing are projects around COVID-19, but I’m not interested -- should I do it anyway?
   Sometimes opportunities appear differently on the surface; they may be more substantive and interesting than they initially appear. Additionally, some opportunities may have flexibility to be tailored to meet your interests as long as they still meet the organization’s needs. This would require a conversation with the Supervisor. For help determining how to approach this situation, please reach out to Practicum Staff.

5. What is the Career & Practicum Office hearing about Practicums from employers? Should we be worried?
   The Career & Practicum Office is in constant communication with our employer partners during these times. So far, it has been very positive regarding employer interest in participating in remote events as an alternative to the Practicum Expo. Additionally, as of this time most employers are not seeing a change in their ability to hire interns. That being said, these are uncertain times -- if we hear anything different we will update you as soon as we know.

6. Will Practicum requirements change?
   No. The requirements for Practicum will remain unchanged. However, we are fully aware that in these fluid times a Practicum project may be impacted by the COVID-19 situation, and will handle these situations as they arise. If you are in a situation where your Practicum is directly impacted you should contact us immediately.

7. Will the timelines change for the Practicum Scholar Award?
   Yes. The Practicum Scholar Award deadline has been extended to May 15, and awards will be announced on May 22. This is subject to change given the fluid environment.

8. It’s going to be too late now...how can I achieve my timeline?
   Fortunately, the Practicum is flexible and can be completed in any semester, and even across multiple semesters! We anticipate the flexibility being a huge asset to students during this outbreak. It is probably good to have a flexible timeline right now as these are fluid times and we cannot anticipate what the future will look like. That being said, if you feel as though your graduation or ILE timeline has been impacted by COVID-19 please be in communication with Practicum Staff so we can handle the situation together.

9. I interviewed for a practicum, but have not heard back, what should I do?
   This question is common, even during “normal” times. Some sectors and organizations move more slowly than others. And, unfortunately, many organizations do not have the resources to follow up with every candidate who interviewed for their practicum. If you have a personal or professional networking contact there, it can be helpful to ask them for an update. Some Human Resources departments are open to receiving a follow-up call or email. While you may try that route, do not take it personally if you don’t receive a response. Please don’t hesitate to reach out to Practicum Staff to discuss.
10. I applied to a few practicums, but have not heard back, what should I do?  
   This question is common, even during “normal” times. Some sectors and organizations move more slowly than 
   others. And, unfortunately, many organizations do not have the resources to follow up with every candidate 
   who applies to their practicum. If you have a personal or professional networking contact there, it can be helpful 
   to ask them for an update. Some Human Resources departments are open to receiving a follow-up call or email. 
   While you may try that route, do not take it personally if you don’t receive a response. Please don’t hesitate to 
   reach out to Practicum Staff to discuss.

11. I received a Practicum offer, but due to COVID-19 it has been placed on hold -- now what do I do?  
   The situation may vary from organization to organization as they internally begin to deal with the outbreak. In 
   situations like this it is best to contact Practicum Staff to discuss your situation.

12. I’m not seeing a lot of postings.  
   Currently there are still many postings in Handshake and Indeed. We are not anticipating a sudden decrease in 
   postings at this time. As always be sure to use keywords and filters to find the best opportunities to suit your 
   skills and interests, but also supplement tools such as the Past Practicum Database & LinkedIn for networking as 
   there are some opportunities that may not exist in writing. Be in contact with Practicum Staff for support and 
   guidance throughout your search as we are still operating at full capacity.

13. We are worried, what is the School doing to help us?  
   We are actively working with employers who were attending the Practicum Expo to find virtual alternatives so 
   that students and employers can still engage about Practicum opportunities. We are leaving the registration link 
   open for other employers to participate as well. Additionally, Career & Practicum Office services remain 
   unchanged -- though we will be operating remotely we are confident we can provide the same support that we 
   offer on site.

14. Will there be less money for organizations to pay Practicum students now?  
   While we cannot say for sure we do know that the COVID-19 pandemic is going to impact the economy in a 
   major way.

15. Can I still do a global Practicum? Will I be able to apply for a travel stipend?  
   Yes, graduate students may still pursue international practicums. Review international practicum guidelines, and 
   the BU Global Programs International Travel Risk Policy. You should consider your own risk tolerance and the 
   situation at your intended site, as well as countries and cities you may pass through to get there. Regarding 
   travel stipends, according to the Boston University President’s March 11 Update Letter, we cannot support 
   international travel with University administrated funds.

16. Should I still be applying to positions, or should I hold off? Are there other strategies I should be using 
   during this uncertain time?  
   These are uncharted waters, and while one organization may have put their hiring on hold, another organization 
   may be actively seeking positions and hoping to hire quickly. If you see a “live” posting, apply for it. If you are 
   able to tap a networking contact, such as an alumna, to inquire about a posting, you should send them a 
   message. Regarding networking, please be patient. People are working and living in uncertain times. In these 
   messages, it’s always good to acknowledge that they may be experiencing changes to their work and home life 
   routines, and that you understand if it is better to connect at a later date. For example, sharing that you hope 
   they are doing well, and are staying healthy and safe during these unprecedented times. If you don’t hear back, 
   it may mean that the person is unable to help at this time. You may want to hold off contacting them again until 
   the COVID-19 situation is a little more stabilized.
A key strategy may also be to mention that you are available to start a practicum or job in the summer (or other
time frame), and give 2 or 3 examples of where you could be of value. For example, you may want to TAILOR some
of these general ideas below to what you anticipate your target organization would likely need:

- Researching evidence-based emergency response strategies and policies
- Drafting new policies for employees, clients, patients, or other stakeholder groups
- Developing communication plans and/or materials targeting employees, clients, patients, or other
  stakeholder groups
- Developing tracking systems to capture important data needed for reporting and/or analysis
- Creating new processes and tools that may help to increase access to services, information, etc.
- Supporting the development of contingency plans related to supply chain disruption
- Analyzing “what-if” scenarios as organizations plan for the short and long term

Note: Most conversations -- and interviews -- will take place via phone or video chat. This is both BEFORE AND
AFTER you land a practicum or job while we’re in the “COVID-19 environment”. See tips here for job searching
and working remotely:

- [https://www.atriumstaff.com/5-tips-for-job-searching-during-coronavirus/](https://www.atriumstaff.com/5-tips-for-job-searching-during-coronavirus/)

17. Is it okay to ask for an informational interview at this time?
As with networking in general, please be patient. People are working and living in uncertain times. In these
messages, it’s always good to acknowledge that they may be experiencing changes to their work and home life
routines, and that you understand if it may be better to connect at a later date. For example, sharing that you
hope they are doing well, and are staying healthy and safe during these unprecedented times. If you don’t hear
back, it may mean that the person is unable to help at this time. You may want to hold off contacting them
again until the COVID-19 situation is a little more stabilized.

18. I am an international student and need to have my CPT form signed. Since the Practicum Staff is working
remotely, how do I get this signed?
Please contact Joe Anzalone at josanz@bu.edu to get your form signed.

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General Career & Practicum Office website:  [https://www.bu.edu/sph/careers/](https://www.bu.edu/sph/careers/)
Practicum Resources website:  [https://www.bu.edu/sph/careers/for-students/practicum/](https://www.bu.edu/sph/careers/for-students/practicum/)
Practicum Staff Email:  sphpract@bu.edu
Career Advising Staff Email:  sphcareeroffice@bu.edu