



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

Temporary Practicum Requirements May Be Applied if Needed Due to Disruptions Caused by COVID-19: Updated July 30, 2020

FOR STUDENTS CURRENTLY CONDUCTING PRACTICUMS (for students seeking practicums, see further section below)

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 the measures outlined below if needed.**

NOTE: While the practicum process has become more flexible and adaptive due to the COVID-19 disruptions, we still want students to strive for – and benefit from – a substantive field experience that propels your public health education forward. Students should do their best to complete the MPH practicum requirements, including practicum hours.

a. 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.

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

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- 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.

c. If you are volunteering to support public health response to COVID-19 in MA or other states:

- Students may use a volunteer position for their required practicum during this difficult time of COVID-19, where public health support is urgently needed. The needs during this unprecedented crisis situation 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.
 - If the organization is too stretched and/or not set up to provide a formal supervisor in this unprecedented time, 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 relate to the work you are doing such as disaster response, addressing health equity issues, leveraging social services, and/or mental health as it relates to isolation, etc. Or, you may opt to complete deliverables that are related to your career interests.
 - In either case, 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

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

d. 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.

e. 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.

The screenshot shows the 'Midpoint Review' tab selected. It includes instructions, a status of 'Pending completion', and a 'Student Assessment' section. A red arrow points to the 'Did your Practicum Proposal information change?' question, which has radio buttons for 'No' and 'Yes'. To the right of the 'Yes' option is a large text area for providing details on changes. Below this is another question: 'Are you on track to complete your required hours?' with radio buttons for 'No' and 'Yes', and a corresponding text area for explanation.

- 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.

This screenshot is identical to the one above, showing the 'Midpoint Review' form. A red arrow points to the 'Are you on track to complete your required hours?' question, which has radio buttons for 'No' and 'Yes'. To the right of the 'No' option is a large text area for explaining why hours are off track.

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: I work Mondays & Wednesdays from 8am-4pm; I have a weekly call with my Supervisor by Zoom; I send a summary of work activities at the end of each week to my Supervisor.)

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. If there is no supervisor available, see Section 1d above.
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?
At this point, most students have been asked to work remotely. That said, there may be a few situations where you are still on site due the nature of some public health work. 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 response activities and I want to say no, but I feel like I'm not "doing my part" during this crisis. 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 about the situation and help you come to a decision you want to make. Reach out to [Practicum Staff](#) to discuss your individual situation.

FOR STUDENTS LOOKING FOR PRACTICUMS

1. What if COVID-19 prevents me from finding a Practicum and my graduation timeline is put at risk?
We know that organizations run on people and public health agencies are busy at work. 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, BUSPH, with guidance from CEPH (our accrediting body), has implemented new temporary options and requirements to prevent students from disrupting their graduation timeline. Please read through this document for various options.
2. Will Practicum requirements change during this COVID-19 crisis?

Yes, during these fluid times we understand that Practicums may be impacted by the COVID-19 situation. Until further notice, please read through this document for various options for completing the practicum requirement. This will apply to Summer 2020 practicums. We have not yet determined extending these options into the Fall, but continue to monitor CEPH updates, national employer surveys, and feedback from our employer and practicum host partners.

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3. 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 can help identify and connect with organizations in your area. Also, use Indeed, LinkedIn & Handshake job boards. In addition, review additional resources in the Career Library such as organizations in the Major U.S. cities.

4. 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.

5. I would like to volunteer to help out with COVID-19 efforts. Can I use these hours toward my practicum?

Yes, students may use a volunteer position in MA or other states for their required practicum during this difficult time of COVID-19, where public health support is urgently needed. The needs during this unprecedented crisis situation vary widely, from delivering food to families in need via Boston Medical Center to phone banking, contact tracing, communications support and more.

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6. 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. It also depends on your graduation timeline. We encourage you to reach out to [Practicum Staff](#) to discuss.

7. 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](#).

8. What is the Career & Practicum Office hearing about Practicums from employers? Should we be worried?

The Career & Practicum Office has been in communications with our employer partners during these times, and

their plans vary. Some organizations are developing 100% remote practicums as a back-up plan for their summer practicums. Others are moving their summer practicums to a Fall start date or canceling. Some are still in a 'wait and see' mode. For these reasons, there are new temporary options/requirements to give students more flexibility such as using volunteer hours.

9. 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.

10. It's going to be too late now...how can I achieve my timeline?

In addition to the new temporary options/requirements we have put into place for students, 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.

11. 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.

12. 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.

13. 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.

14. I received a Practicum offer, but due to COVID-19 I am worried it will be cancelled —should I ask?

We do expect that organizations will let students know if they have cancelled their practicum/internship program for the summer. However, for many organizations, they may not have decided since the situation is changing so rapidly. We are hearing that they are in a "wait and see" mode and unable to answer for sure. In situations like this it is best to contact [Practicum Staff](#) to discuss your situation.

15. I'm not seeing a lot of postings.

Currently there are still many postings in Handshake and Indeed, however, we are starting to see that some organizations are putting their summer internship programs on hold until Fall 2020.

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.

16. We are worried, what is the School doing to help us?

We are actively holding virtual sessions with employers who had planned to participate in the Practicum Expo, so that students and employers can still engage about Practicum opportunities. See Handshake for details. We have also sent out a survey to employers to check on their current and future needs.

17. 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. If you are doing an unpaid practicum, you may apply for the [Practicum Scholar Award](#). The deadline to apply has been extended until May 15. Note: This date is subject to change due to COVID-19.

18. Can I still do a global Practicum? Will I be able to apply for a travel stipend?

No. Due to the global spread of COVID-19, BU has suspended ALL domestic and international travel by faculty, staff, and students during this period including practicums. Review [international practicum guidelines](#), and the [BU Global Programs International Travel Risk Policy](#). Due to Boston University President's [March 11 Update Letter](#), we cannot support international travel with University administrated funds.

19. 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: At this point during the COVID-19 crisis, you should expect that almost all 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 of social distancing*. See tips here for job searching and working remotely:

- <https://www atriumstaff.com/5-tips-for-job-searching-during-coronavirus/>
- <https://lambdaschool.com/the-commons/how-to-navigate-your-job-search-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic>
- <https://www.vault.com/blogs/workplace-issues/how-to-master-working-remotely>

20. 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 are 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.

21. 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.

22. I am expecting to conduct my practicum in person, and the practicum site is asking me to complete COVID-19 training and to follow their safety protocols. They are also asking for an update on what BU is requiring of students and practicum sites. Can you please advise?

Boston University adopted several [guidelines](#) that it expects practicum sites will follow to the extent possible. Essentially, for the safety of all, Boston University expects that, when students are required to be present, practicum sites will (1) follow all health-related guidelines issued by state and local authorities, including any guidelines for social distancing and/or remote work, (2) when appropriate, provide to students the same protective measures that it uses for its own staff and (3) promptly advise the student and the Boston University Career & Practicum Office (sphpract@bu.edu) if any person with whom the student comes into contact while performing his or her obligations under the Program receives a positive COVID-19 diagnosis. It is expected that students will follow all of the protocols set forth by the practicum site in an effort to stay healthy, and in support of the organization's overall health and safety plans.

General Career & Practicum Office website: <https://www.bu.edu/sph/careers/>

Practicum Resources website: <https://www.bu.edu/sph/careers/for-students/practicum/>

Practicum Staff Email: sphpract@bu.edu | Career Advising Staff Email: sphcareeroffice@bu.edu