



School of Architecture Northeastern University

Best Practices for a Successful Co-op

Thank you for being an employer partner, and for your efforts in providing our students with a quality learning experience while on co-op. I have prepared this “check list” to help guide your hiring, onboarding, student engagement, and evaluation processes.

I am here to support both employers and students throughout the entire co-op process and to help you make the most of the co-op experience. Remember that I am a resource for you, so do not hesitate to be in touch with questions, feedback or any concerns that may arise.

EXTENDING A CO-OP OFFER

An offer letter may include the following:

- Position title
- Start and end date
- Supervisor's name and email address
- Location of co-op
- Compensation and work hours
- Overtime policy if applicable
- Pay schedule and pay method
- Employment terms (temporary worker or at-will)
- Any additional benefits, if applicable*

Provide tax withholding paperwork for federal, state, and local taxes. Co-op students must not be classified as independent consultants. Please refer to our Co-op Employer Guide for more information.

**There is no expectation that students will be paid any benefits for vacation or personal time off; co-op employees may be eligible for paid sick leave and overtime pursuant to state law.*

ONBOARDING YOUR ARCHITECTURE CO-OP STUDENT

Start strong by dedicating time in the first week to proper onboarding.

- Establish clear expectations regarding work hours, dress code, attendance, communication protocols, payment schedule, and sick time procedures.
- During the first week, introduce your co-op student to team members, tour the office and project sites, and review your firm's workflow, software systems, and documentation standards.
- Please include the co-op student in any HR or IT orientations that your firm or company requires for all new hires.
- Assign a designated supervisor who will serve as their primary contact and schedule regular check-ins throughout the term. Regular feedback throughout the co-op helps students understand their growth and gives them valuable professional development.
- Establish learning outcomes with the co-op student to provide a roadmap to assist in evaluating the student's performance at the end of the co-op placement.
- Share any practical operational details like file naming conventions, CAD standards, printing protocols, and how your firm organizes project files.

Encourage the co-op student to reach out to others in the firm or company to ask questions and help direct them where they may find precedents or research materials. Remember that co-op students are there to learn while contributing.

Build in opportunities for them to observe client meetings, contribute in design discussions, join lunch and learns, attend site visits, and gain exposure to different project phases.

Make sure they know they should be asking questions and speak up when they finish tasks.

The investment you make in thoughtful mentorship typically results in a more engaged, capable co-op student who contributes meaningfully to your firm while developing skills for their future career.

CONTACT

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EXPECTATIONS OF MANAGER

- Establish and clarify work expectations for the student.
- Schedule regular meetings with the student to share constructive feedback.
- Complete an online assessment of the student's performance when you receive Northeastern's email prompt.
- Plan an exit interview to review the online assessment with the student before they complete their co-op in order to provide valuable feedback. Please ask the student to also share their thoughts on how the co-op went so you can collect feedback for future hires.
- Offer to review the student's resume to best reflect their experience, and to develop work samples for future employment, where applicable.

EXPECTATIONS OF STUDENT

- Students are expected to work the full duration of their co-op placement dates.
- Students are expected to conduct themselves with the utmost professionalism; reply to communications (emails, slack messages, etc.)
- Professionally, report to work on time, work independently and collaboratively when needed.
- Dress in accordance with company culture.

For some of our students, their co-op is their first full-time work experience or first work experience outside their home country. Therefore, some students may feel shy or unsure about what to ask and what is expected from them, so we encourage employers to initiate that conversation.

Students are expected to prioritize their co-op responsibilities; with few exceptions, our students do not take any coursework during their co-op, and certainly are not permitted to take classes or engage in non-related co-op activities during established work hours.

Students are encouraged to take initiative and ask questions when they do not understand, ask for additional projects, or volunteer for additional activities when they have completed assigned tasks.

Students are encouraged to network with their colleagues and join work-related professional development and social activities; we encourage students to connect with colleagues on LinkedIn, volunteer for projects, groups, or events, and to get to know their team outside the office, when applicable and appropriate.

SUPPORTING STUDENT LICENSURE THROUGH AXP

Many Northeastern architecture co-op students participate in NCARB's Architectural Experience Program (AXP) and will want to document their co-op hours toward the 3,740 hours required for licensure if applicable. To support this, we encourage firms to designate a licensed architect who can serve as the student's AXP supervisor, reviewing and approving their experience reports through the NCARB system. Students are responsible for logging their own hours and submitting reports, but having a designated mentor who understands AXP requirements makes the process smoother for everyone.

This mentor should be available to answer questions about whether specific tasks qualify for AXP credit and provide brief check-ins about the student's experience across different project phases.

Supporting AXP documentation benefits both the student's professional development and your firm. This also demonstrates your commitment to developing emerging professionals and students do take notice.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Co-op coordinators serve as instructors and advisors for students and can be a pivotal resource in remedying any issues on co-op.

Additionally, co-op coordinators can serve as a resource for employers in offering best practices and supporting both the student and employer for any issues on the job.

If a student is not meeting the expectations set for them, Northeastern encourages employers to reach out to their designated co-op coordinator in addition to following the organization's usual HR protocols.

On rare occasions, termination of a co-op does occur; but as with any employee, it should be the last resort.

Please involve the designated co-op coordinator to address any concerns before moving to the organization's termination process.

