

Recruiting International Students as Interns

International students can be excellent interns who bring robust career experience, unique perspectives, language skills, and global public health insights. It is not difficult to recruit international students as interns, and you shouldn't discount them because you're worried about additional requirements. However, there are a few important legal and practical considerations preceptors need to be aware of.

1. Work Authorization Is Required

International students must have legal work authorization to intern in the U.S. Most students are on F-1 visas, and their internships must follow certain guidelines:

For paid internships:

- Students need Curricular Practical Training (CPT) or Optional Practical Training (OPT) authorization.
- These must be approved by their school's international student office.
- CPT is more common while the student is in school; OPT is typically used post-graduation.

For unpaid internships:

- Still often require CPT (check with the student's school).
- Must meet [U.S. Department of Labor rules for unpaid internships](#) (especially in the nonprofit/public sectors).

2. The Student's School Handles the Paperwork

- The student works with their Designated School Official (DSO) to apply for CPT or OPT.
- Employers (you) typically do not need to sponsor a visa, but may need to provide an offer letter or a description of duties, location, and dates.
- Every school may have slightly different procedures. When in doubt, ask the student to connect you with their international student office.

3. Plan Ahead--Authorization Can Take Time

- CPT approval usually takes 1–2 weeks once the offer is made.
- OPT must be applied for months in advance and may take up to 90 days for approval.

4. Communicate Early and Clearly

Ask students early in the process:

- "Do you require work authorization for this internship?"
- "Have you worked with your international student office to confirm your eligibility?"

Encourage them to share relevant deadlines and be prepared to provide any needed documentation from your organization

5. You Don't Need to Be an Immigration Expert

- Rely on the student's university for immigration and legal guidance.
- Your role is to provide a meaningful internship aligned with your public health mission.
- Be flexible and open-minded—international students often have strong academic preparation and offer a valuable global lens.