

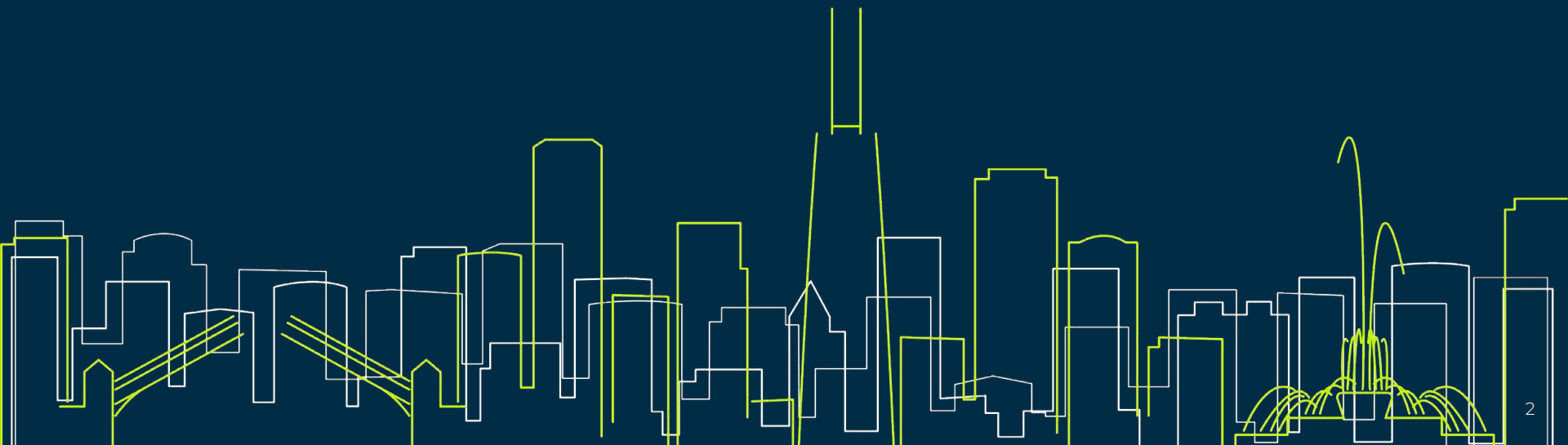
**BREAK
THROUGH
TECH**

CHI

Sprinternship Playbook

Chicago's tech ecosystem is about to change.

Inclusion begins here — with you.



We are excited to work together!

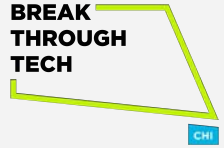


This Playbook will:



- **Answer questions** you might have about your participation
- Provide a **timeline** for your partnership with us
- Give you a sense of past **challenge projects** that other Sprinternship providers have chosen
- Sketch out a **general schedule** that 3-week Sprinternships might follow

Frequently asked questions



Isn't the FAQ normally at the end?

Yes, that's true — but we wanted to address early on the questions we often hear from Sprinternship partners. We hope these answers will offer valuable context for the information later in the Playbook.

Who will our Sprinterns be?

Sprinterns are women and nonbinary students at the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC) who are in good academic standing and have an interest in studying computer science and pursuing a career related to computing or technology. About half will be freshmen and sophomores, the remainder juniors and seniors.

How are Sprinterns matched with us?

Organizations fill out a form to identify their desired technical skill sets, and we do our best to match your needs with students' expertise and interests.

Why do Sprinterns come in teams?

Because Sprinterns are college students, many of them in their first or second year, it works well for them to have peer support. It helps organizations to have a balanced slate of skill sets, and industry partners report that it isn't extra work to host a group, as our students participate in all of their activities together.

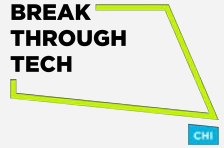
Is there a day-to-day structure we must follow?

Sprinterns are expected to work a standard 8-hour day, Monday through Friday. You can structure the specific schedule within those hours. [View an example in this file.](#)

Are there any required activities?

Yes. Sprinternships are structured around a challenge project that allows Sprinterns to work in a team. We also ask that you provide an introduction to your organization (especially key functions such as marketing, finance, and HR) and a professional résumé review. How you do all of that is up to you.

More frequently asked questions



Are Sprinternships in-person or online?

Most organizations are moving to a hybrid workplace, which Sprinternships can accommodate. If you need a 100-percent remote model, please let us know.

Do the staff mentors for the Sprinterns need to be here in Chicago?

We specifically seek out Chicago-area organizations as Sprinternship partners, but we recognize that many workplaces are in remote or hybrid mode. If this situation allows you to capitalize on the strengths of staff members located elsewhere, please do.

What is the mentor time commitment like?

The time commitment varies depending on the project selection and the mentor's ability to coordinate with others at the host site. The mentor will lead the project and should expect to provide technical and other coaching, but they should in turn expect to benefit from the work that the Sprintern team provides.

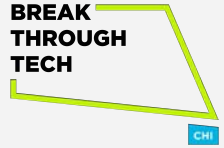
Is three weeks long enough to provide a valuable experience for all involved?

A Sprinternship is intentionally designed to be a "sprint", a model that has been tested and refined in New York since 2017. An average of 50 percent of past participants were successful in securing summer internships after completing their Sprinternships. It is long enough for students to gain exposure and set themselves up for success for future internships. For employers, the effort is substantial yet achievable, and aligns with their core values of diversity and equity.

How do partner organizations typically use Sprinterns' findings and reports?

Sprinterns' work products can do anything from inspire new ideas among your full-time staff to provide an action-ready plan. Just as importantly, several organizations have embedded the experience of leading and mentoring Sprinterns into their leadership development programs.

Yet more frequently asked questions



What financial commitment is required?

We advise organizations to plan for \$10,000 to \$15,000 in direct student compensation for five Sprinterns for a 3-week duration. We recommend pay of no less than \$17 per hour. Your financial support allows our Sprinterns to pursue this career-shaping experience, as many of our their situations would not allow them to choose an unpaid internship over a paid position outside of tech.

Who onboards and compensates the students?

The sponsoring organization is responsible for onboarding the students, either via in-house functions or temp agencies. UIC cannot be the employer of record.

How is UIC involved?

UIC faculty and staff provide 30 to 60 minutes of virtual coaching per week, encouraging each team to resolve conflicts, own the problem-solving process, and communicate effectively. Sprinterns schedule coaching time, and employers need not participate.

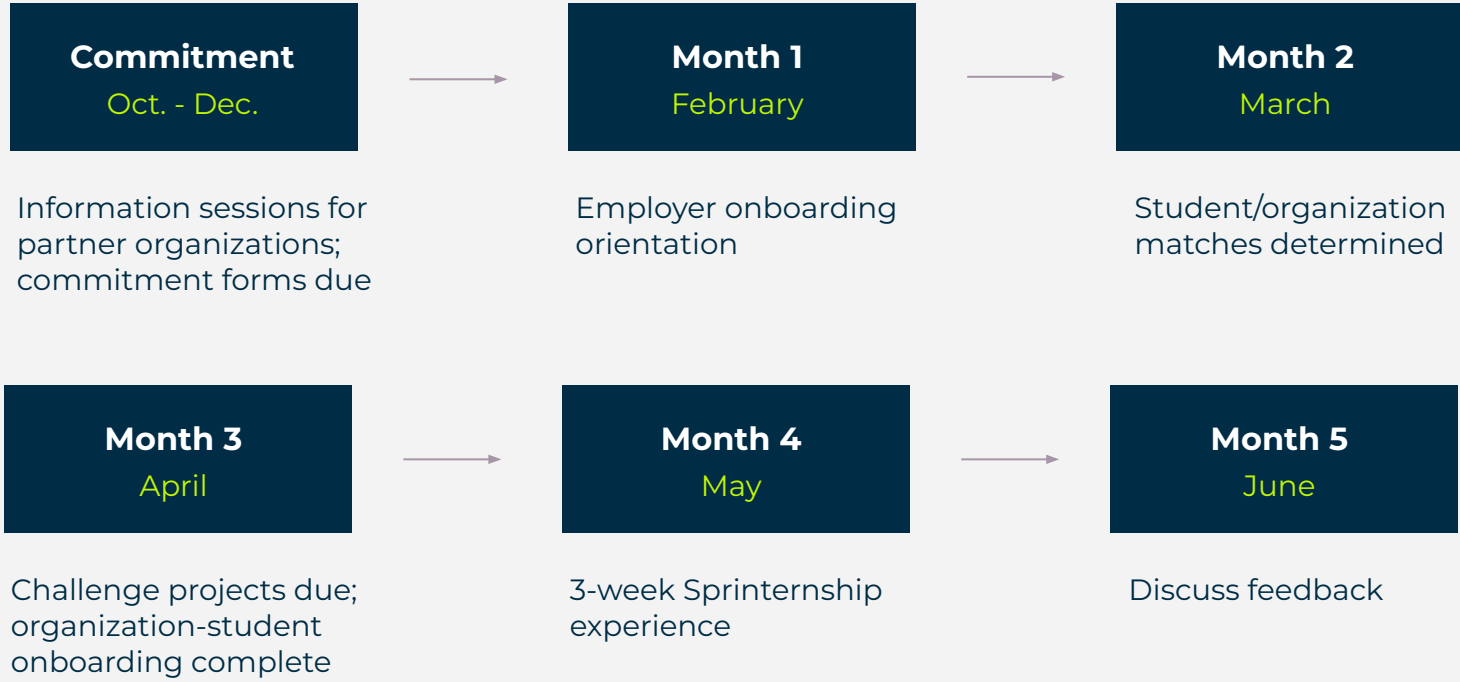
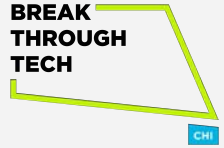
What are the parameters for the Sprinternship deliverable?

Because the majority of our students are computing majors, the best experience includes a design and/or development deliverable. An assessment may be part of the scope, but we ask that it not be the only focus.

Can we hire Sprinterns for a full internship?

Yes! Organizations are welcome to invite Sprinterns to interview for internships and/or extend offers. However, please note that this is neither required nor expected.

Sprinternship timeline



Setting expectations

Sprinters will ...

- Have an interest in computer science or technology
- Be likely to have taken at least one college course in computer science or data science
- Demonstrate a positive, constructive attitude toward the challenge project you provide for the group
- Have completed Break Through Tech Chicago workshops on goal-setting, professional communication, and résumé preparation
- Arrive on time and be present for 35 to 40 hours a week

Setting expectations

Partner organizations will ...

- Create a safe and comfortable learning environment
- Assign a mentor/manager to coach the Sprintern team
- Clarify compensation, benefits, and pay period with Sprinterns
- Schedule regular check-in meetings to provide guidance
- Provide a résumé review session and explain hiring processes
- Introduce Sprinterns to people in various roles and departments
- Offer constructive feedback on the final challenge-project deliverable

The challenge project



What are your tech hurdles? Where do you require forward-thinking solutions or an alternative approach?

Each Sprinternship must include a challenge project that allows Sprinterns to think creatively, develop new skills, and work as a team. Each organization **designs its own** unique project that asks the Sprintern team to come up with **technological innovations**, perhaps to solve an internal issue or enhance specific products and services. This is a great opportunity to take a deep dive into areas your core team may not have the bandwidth to explore.

Suggested framework:



- Position the project as a creative sprint
- Pose the question: How might we...?
- Give students a structure for how to approach a problem, ideate, and choose a solution
- Provide opportunities for both individual brainstorming and teamwork
- Finish the project with a presentation to your leadership team

Project inspiration



Argonne National Laboratory

Scientists compete for the opportunity to use Argonne's supercomputers to aid in their research. Sprinterns helped develop a system to evaluate whether the scientists chosen go on to produce work that has widespread impact.

Google

Many companies are looking for valuable uses for generative AI. Sprinterns helped Google in their efforts, considering how to apply generative AI to large public data sets to produce findings that offer value to a broad range of users.

Adams Street Partners

Sprinterns contributed to the firm's ongoing project to gain insight from financial data on privately held companies. The team's work encompassed data storage, cleaning, analysis, and presentation.

Illinois Department of Transportation

To determine how large language models might improve road safety, Sprinterns integrated weather alerts into IDOT's traffic management systems, enabling map pop-ups that could help drivers to make real-time decisions.

One project in depth



Here's how **Cisco** created a unique Challenge Project for its Sprinterns.

Objective

Create a proposal for how Cisco and UIC can overcome the digital divide in a Chicago community.

“How might we ...”

With the rise of remote learning, access to fast internet service has become a must. But many urban students lack a high-quality broadband connection at home. How can Cisco and UIC work together to provide a network that can close the digital gap and foster academic success for students in a particular neighborhood?

Project framework

In the first week, Sprinterns were introduced to Cisco as a company. They learned about its technologies, met with leaders and sales representatives, and came up with a focus for their broadband access project.

Sprinterns spent the second week working with account teams and engineers. With the account teams, they analyzed data that led to insights that informed their plan. Engineers then helped them to design a network that could bring fast internet to an underserved, lower-income community near UIC.

As the Sprinterns created their final presentation in their third week, Cisco staff coached them to build presentation skills, pitch an idea, and gain stakeholder buy-in. The Sprinterns also used the third week to explore career paths at Cisco and craft revised résumés.

Three transformative weeks

How you structure your Sprinternship schedule is up to you. Here is a general example of how it might play out:

WEEK 1

Possible experiences:

- Orientation session
- Organization overview
- Challenge project kickoff
- Project work sessions
- “Get to know our department” presentations
- Shadowing afternoon
- Mentor check-in

WEEK 2

Possible experiences:

- Project work sessions
- Industry 101
- Technical workshops (e.g., coding, design, UX/UI)
- Career guidance session
- Chat with a senior leader
- Résumé review
- Mentor check-in

WEEK 3

Possible experiences:

- Project work sessions
- Final presentation prep
- Sit in on a meeting
- Recruiting overview
- Mentor check-in
- Final presentation
- Closing celebration

TIPS FOR PROJECT WORK SESSIONS

Consider involving your Sprinterns in:

- Meetings with stakeholders to explore and define the problem
- User research to inform design ideas
- Prototype creation and testing

We can break barriers.

We can open doors.

We can reshape industries.

Are you ready to be part of Chicago's inclusive tech ecosystem?

Organizations that have hosted Break Through Tech Sprinterns report that with just a few basic ingredients — a flexible challenge project, a strong tie between your Sprintern mentor and your HR team, and the willingness to be a champion for your Sprinterns — you can provide a career-changing experience.

chicago.breakthroughtech.org

