



Internship AMA Summer 2021

This is summary of the questions asked at the Internship Ask Me Anything Meeting held on April 16th, 2021

Location/working hours

Virtual or In-person: Is the internship still going to be virtual this summer or in person?

We will be fully remote this summer.

Working Hours: What are our expected working hours?

Interns have the option to work 4 weeks at 20/30/40 hours/week or 8 weeks at a minimum of 20 hours/week. It is up to the candidate to let us know their availability during the onboarding meeting.

Hours on Zoom: How many hours will we spend on Zoom? Is there a set amount of time for each? Will it depend day to day? Will we be expected to have our Zoom cameras on but then work on another window and work our way?

We don't do very many Zoom work-alongs. We don't take attendance. What we do is provide an effective framework for each member to get the support required to contribute successfully. Some of that time will be spent on Zoom (see the details below).

Internship Standup: This is new, and will happen at M-F at 9:00. We will review the following:

1. Progress
2. Blockers
3. Plans

"These questions highlight progress and help flag team blockers. Also, it strengthens the team when everyone shares the progress they're contributing to the team. The daily reinforcement of sharing individual successes and plans keeps everyone excited about the team's overall contribution to the organization."
[- Atlassian. Stand-ups for agile teams](#)



Team meetings : Held on Zoom, All team meetings (UI/UX, product management, engineering, ect. meetings): Make team and leadership decisions.

Example: you are a software engineer working from a design in our Figma file, and you get to a point where the Figma doesn't tell you what the behavior of a drop-down is. So you would bring that to the all team meeting to run by the designers. You might already have some options or ideas (even make a demo possibly) yourself and it's a chance to get the entire team's feedback and decision. Decisions/discussions can be either easily defined, such as the above or with an unclear path such as feasibility discussions, where we are not trying to make a decision but rather narrow down the options for a team member to go do some more exploring.

Breakouts for specific practice areas: People go into a breakout room to discuss and solve problems specific to their practice area.

Example: Developers have their own breakout room in which they give each other updates on weekly progress. It moves quickly. Discussions go along the lines of, this is what I found hard about this week, or this was really easy. It's the place where you get help from your lead choosing an issue that matches the level of challenge that you are ready for. Or that you started on front end issues (everyone does), and are now ready to move to backend issues.

Practice area only meetings: Based on the level of maturity of your project, there may be additional meetings for the following practice areas. These are similar to breakout rooms. Sometimes these meetings utilize mob programming, where one person shows their screen and talks about a challenge that they're having. All the developers review and work on that challenge together.

- i. Development/Software engineering
- ii. Back-end
- iii. Design
- iv. Product

Communities of practice: A Community of Practice (CoP) is a group of people who share a common interest in a topic and meet regularly to fulfill both individual and group goals. At Hack for LA, we use CoPs to share effective practices and relevant domain knowledge to help our members grow. All new volunteers at Hack for LA should join the relevant CoP and work on a couple of issues there to familiarize themselves with GitHub and how things work at Hack for LA. Once you have some proficiency, you will be assigned to a project. You are encouraged to continue attending CoP meetings to continue domain learning and peer to peer mentorship.

One-on-one meetings: You can schedule one-on-one meetings with other team members by asking for help on a specific issue during a team meeting, breakout session or on your team's Slack channel. We use a team support structure, where instead of going to one person all the time, you put your request in the channel and whoever has the time will get back to you. This reduces the burden on well known team members and gives everyone a chance to do peer support. It also accommodates differing levels of availability.

Pair programming: This is rare in our org but can be effective. However, letting another team member's availability hold up your progress is not a good idea. Which is why we generally don't put multiple people on the same issue.

Types of projects

Project focus: What sort of projects would we be doing in this sort of internship? Is it just a bunch of different projects from different places? Or is it focused on one area?

Which project you are assigned will depend on your particular community of practice. We offered three internship tracks this summer (see below). We will ask you to get very focused on a project and we'll size the opportunity to your initial skillset with a growth plan for your time here.

Software Engineer

Skill set self evaluation:

Solo developer -If you have only ever worked on things by yourself, or you've never worked on anything in an environment where you're doing pull requests and GitHub branching, then we will put you on the website project where you will be learning from the ground up how to work on a team. The website project is essentially a working model of an effective dev team. While building the website, you also get to practice important leadership and communication skills (among others) for working in a dev team. You'll use these skills in any dev team you join, even after Hack for LA. Read more about the [steps to becoming a lead dev](#).

Team Developer with PR review experience - If you have developed with others and reviewed other's pull requests, then you'll have a wider set of options of projects you can contribute to. Options range from apps that address homelessness to government regulation. Which projects are appropriate will depend on the languages you know.

UI/UX

You will be working on a design system and depending on your skillset (design or research) we will provide a challenging assignment.

Special Projects Coordinator

The summer of 2021 internship will involve setting up the framework for this inaugural crop of interns and for future iterations of the program. Additionally there will be other observations and suggestions for organizational improvement in any area.

Deliverables

How is work assigned?

The nice thing about being a developer or designer at Hack for LA is you don't have to wait to be assigned things. We have a prioritized backlog, which is the to-do column of the Kanban. And as soon as you're done with your issue, you can grab a new issue. So how much you do is totally up to you.

Special Projects Coordinator:: For the Special Projects coordinator, what are some of the deliverables that are going to be asked? What might be an example of something that the special project coordinator might spend a day on or a couple of hours on?

Bonnie: Because our organization is so dynamic, part of the role of the Special Projects Coordinator is to help decide the course of the organization. Another one of your roles will be facilitating the integration of this inaugural class of interns. There will be conversations about how we prioritize most projects. All projects at Hack for LA require a lot of conversations about prioritization and value creation. So while developers and UI/UX will not see as much of that, the special projects coordinators will be steeped in that. I'll involve some supervisory responsibilities as well. So there'll be plenty of opportunities to see how you can leverage the power of an organization that has an unlimited labor force because we literally have 100 new people every month trying to join our organization. And so putting them to effective use, changing the world of civic tech, and civic life is, is a key mission. What would you do if you had a company with an unlimited labor budget? Your job as the Special Projects Coordinator is to figure out what we could do with that.

Dean: One of the things you'll learn if you are selected for the special coordinator role is the Agile tenant of servant leadership, how to use influence and empower others to coordinate to get it done through agency. Less delegation, but more through conversational influence.

Work software

Software: What work software is used at HackforLA?

[Slack](#) (day to day communication)

Our Slack is unpaid so we use it to have a quick group or one on one conversation. However you will need to memorialize any decisions made in the issue you are working on.

[Google Drive](#) (document collaboration)

[GitHub](#) (product management and code repositories)

We use Github Project Boards because it puts developers and their UI/UX, product management, marketing, ect. teammates into the developer environment, which gives non-developers an edge when they go out into the business world.

[Figma](#) (design software)

[Miro](#) (digital whiteboard)

Kanban Methodology (team workflow management)

Bonnie: Kanban is the product management methodology we use at Hack for LA, but many product management software tools (Jira, Trello, etc.) are founded on the same essential principle of breaking work down into three categories: to do, doing, and done. Here is our [guide to how Hack for LA uses Kanban](#)

I don't try to remember anything. I can't, if I had to run as much stuff as I run, and if I had to remember things or find to go digging in emails for them, it just wouldn't be possible. So we put everything about any particular given topic in an issue. And then anybody can pick it up at any time, we think of this as because we have volunteers coming on and off all the time. So we think of this as a relay race that never ends, you're just you're doing your work, and you're prepping it for the next person to come along. So you can hand it off to them. And sometimes you're handing it off to them without you and them ever connecting because you're gone. And in the end, the issue got deprioritized or something like that, and then someone else is going to pick it up, and they're gonna be able to hit the ground running.

Dean: Bonnie undersold the kanban, You asked what the secret sauce was, it was to refine the chunk of work, which is the issue. And then there are conversations amongst the collaborators on the team to prioritize the work. That's called the backlog, prioritized backlog. And then the super-secret sauce from the chef called kanban is the work in process where everybody's working on only one chunk of work at a time. And then that's how you get that from left to right, that that's how the work gets done in a steady-state manner. And that's, that's the goal of HackForLA's utilization of that framework.

Collaboration - #/type of people

How many people collaborate on a single project?

3-20, depending on the project you're working on

What are the experience levels of people on projects at HackforLA?

We have created an environment where every member and the org itself benefit from the wide variety of shared experiences of the members.

From high school students to Ph.D, from novice to expert, there is knowledge to be gained by sharing practices and working collaboratively, making mistakes and learning from them in an environment that values failing fast and learning.

We develop the leadership capacity of all of our members. We have people who joined a month ago who are leading projects and people who are senior in their fields who contribute without having day to day leadership responsibilities

Will we be working on an all-student team?

No. We have paused our all student teams because we found that what successfully prepares people for work is to put them on a team made up of people with a variety of skill levels and ages - Just like work.

Training program

Do you have a sustained training program to train new people who come in?

Yes. The community of practice is meant to be the place where people start first. And it is getting better as a starting place for new members as they mature. The communities of practice are less than a year old. Communities of practice are run by its members and members are encouraged to suggest agenda items.

Sophia (Co-lead, data science community of practice): The community of practice started with Ops, which is essentially DevOps, data science was the second, I think. But the way we run it is a combination of advice for other projects. So we kind of do a sort of just so we work both as a collective source of data science information, and also as a place for folks who are relatively new to data science to come in and get experience where you're running our own sort of data science focus mini-projects, where new data scientists can sort of check-in with us week to week and talk about their progress. Talk about any blockers they're having, and give them advice too. We're also working on doing code reviews. And any other project from Hack for LA can join us and ask questions that they have about their data to get some advice about how to tackle their problems.

b.

Supervision/mentorship system

15 minute weekly check in with HackforLA leaders, LinkedIn workshops, personal plan

Details specific to roles:

Special Project Coordinator

Lots of face time because they will be doing a lot of work with leaders of the entire organization, peer mentorship

UI/UX

Direct contact with the leader with the UI/UX community of practice and if assigned to a project, your project's team leader, peer mentorship

Software engineer

Direct contact with the leader with the engineer community of practice and if assigned to a project, your project's team leader, peer mentorship

Documentation

How we are moving from a Tribal knowledge organization (which works when you are small) to a scalable organization

At Hack for LA, volunteer knowledge is a huge asset. And there's some of that knowledge built into various projects. If we don't document it, then it leaves with people who discovered it as soon as they move on. We're in this process now of making guides for everything. The community of practice (and the website as the

guides get published) will store and share this knowledge in the organization when the volunteers leave. Essentially, when somebody comes to the organization, the first place after onboarding they will go is the community of practice. They will first fill out an experience profile on things they need to learn while they're here and then as they go learn those things, they will document their process with screenshots and reports and make them into links and put them in their experience profile, and these links will be added to a guide. This guide will be kept at HackforLA after these volunteers leave.

What is the volunteer's incentive to make guides?

What happens when people first join our organization is that maybe they don't have any experience in a specific area, but it's an important area for growth and they know they want to get it added to the resume, so they go find out more about it. They go talk to each of the teams and ask them, have they done this thing? How did they do it, and then get them to give you a download of that and you write it up. Here are the examples. Here are the assets they gave me that are related to this, you go and talk to three or four teams. Then you write about what you learned from the perspective of studying how things work in the field at Hack for LA. That's the guide. The reason to do it is that you and anyone else can use it on future projects. That's part of our Agile practice. It's a great way to get up to speed on something quickly. Because you're not just going and pestering some team to spend a lot of time telling you how to do something, you're turning that time into a valuable asset that everyone can use. And so it's valuable for the person who's spending the time answering your questions, for you who's putting it together, and for everybody else. We're very into practical education here. I don't want to learn how to do something if I'm not going to use it.

Company culture

Inclusivity

Many organizations nowadays acknowledge the need to build with not for, and they include perspectives from the communities they serve. Hack for LA goes a step farther through our policy of radical inclusivity. Our door is really open to anyone. If we don't welcome input from the members of society our solutions are for, then we perpetuate inequality. If we only let those fortunate enough to afford a computer and a college degree to work in tech, then the solutions will continue to benefit those in society who are fortunate enough to have economic security. Radical inclusivity is the only way we're going to change the world.

The power of yes

I started my first business when I was 20. Because it was the one place where nobody could say no to my ideas. And that early risk taking led to me eventually becoming a successful tech entrepreneur building a ½ a billion dollars worth of software and doing turnarounds on over 100 companies. While a lot of things have changed since I was 20, what has not changed is how much the world says no. I still chafe when people tell me no, I think that if you have the energy and the passion to run, you should do that. Innovation requires disruption. We have to be the change we want to see in the world. And we have to make it happen faster than the forces of entropy. Hack for LA's is based on harnessing and channeling the energy of each of you. I find myself saying yes as much as possible. And it starts with yes, and let's figure out how to do this in a professional way. If you have an idea, the answer is generally Yes. Because it's better to try something and if it doesn't work out, we learn from it and that helps us grow. How can we be better if we veto everything so thoroughly that nothing ever gets done?

Everyone has value

And I would say one other big component is believing in every single person's ability, whether they're, the eight-year-old who just joined Hack for LA or the seventy-year-old. Every single person is going to come here and make a difference. While we do have hierarchical structures here, you will find less of that than anywhere else. There's a lot of you who show up and say want to do something, and I and everybody else is like, Okay, great. Let's do it, here's the tools. Get it done. This is a place where you will find no limits on your ability to lead.

How does HackforLA decide which projects to take on?

We don't want to be the people who sit around and go, "we can solve the world, let's make a solution", and then go look for the problem. Right? Nor do we want to replace the collective wisdom of the people already doing incredible work in space. What we want to do is power other people's good work with our technology. So if there's an organization that's doing something amazing and impactful, and it's clear that more of that is needed, we offer our help and they tell us what their needs are. Then we build a project around that.

If you take the criteria I just outlined, you would end up with a lot of great projects but you can't do them all. Our organization is in a constant state of evaluating new projects, revising existing projects and measuring outcomes, all while creating a sustainable flexible organization. Funding for project sustainability and value for our volunteers are top criteria.

Personal perspectives from HfLA members

HfLA encourages making mistakes and learning as you go while making a contribution.



Ben: When I joined Hack for LA, I didn't know any JavaScript, I just knew a bit of Python. My team taught me what I wanted to be working on. I'd try and I'd fail, and they'd tell me where I went wrong. It was because of their support that I was able to catch on. The whole pack was like a community that was really supportive. Bonnie spent at least four days worth of time mentoring me and has at least half a dozen LinkedIn reviews. So it's a really supportive community. And if you want to do something, there'll be people who will help you.

Bonnie: There is a young man who has not gone to college, but he did a technical internship for four months. Afterwards, he said that in the first month of Hack for LA he learned more than the entire four month long internship. Most companies are afraid of interns, because their structure does not allow them to manage them easily. At a traditional organization, they have to put somebody on you there to make sure you don't break anything. We want you to break things here! Come break some stuff with us, break it, help us fix it, you're gonna to be the driver of how much you can learn here and the sky is really the limit because its self directed and peer supported.

Sophia: I'm not going to call you out, Pete, but the story ties in. I just wanted to second the importance of breaking things. And that's how you learn.

Pete: Bring it on.

Sophia: The best way to learn something is to do it, and then learn never to do it again. We had Pete here very early in his Hack for LA career, and he pushed the AWS credentials to GitHub. And that is a classic. Yep. As Joshua's face says, that is not good.

Pete: I brought down every project at Hack for LA all at the same time. I think that was the first thing I was asked to do.

Sophia: It was the first thing you were asked to do.

Bonnie: Yeah. And now we have tools in place to keep anybody from doing that. So if you haven't heard about blameless retrospectives, it's a mindset that celebrates when anybody makes a mistake because they reveal a place where we can improve. We can talk about exactly how it happened and what we can put in place, script-wise or other policy-wise, that will keep that from happening again.

Sophia: Yeah, the idea is to not be afraid to do something. Sometimes when you dive into something that's new, especially if it's programming related, you feel like you don't have as much experience as everyone else and that you're just going to screw it up. Because you think that your code is not as elegant or that you don't really know the best way to do something, you get a little hesitant to dive in. The idea here is the opposite. dive in right away. If you break something, that's fine, we'll figure out how to fix it. And

you'll learn along the way. That's great. One of the best things that happens at Hack for LA is having more senior people look over your code, and give you advice and say, oh, this is a good way to do it. Because of some quirk that you weren't aware of, a better way to attack this sort of problem is to treat it like this instead. It's like walking through your own logic with someone else. And having them take apart your code and put it back together in a more thoughtful method has been really educational. I've gotten better as a programmer through code reviews like these.

Dean: Yeah, to leverage off of what Sophia just said, they're picking apart your logic in your code objectively, there's no personal attack against you. It's just here you are your approach as a coder, and this is a way you've chosen to solve the problem.

I'm curious about Ben's experience at Hack for LA. As someone closer to our age, I was wondering how you felt when you're starting off? Where did you start off? What was your skill level? How do you feel now and what is your skill level now?

Ben: What I'll say is, I came in with some skills, but some very useless skills. I was fluent in a mobile framework called flutter, which I don't know if any of you know of, but nobody knew of it at the time. So I could develop mobile apps in a framework that nobody else knew. So it couldn't work with the team. And that was about all I could do. And I joined the team, as a web developer, I was the very lowest level of developer. And it was just through continuing developing, starting on small features, and just moving my way up with bigger and bigger features that I was able to learn. And it took me at least a few months, probably closer to six to get into leadership. It really taught me a lot. And I've just learned a lot through, if you take on an issue, and you do the code reviews, and it just teaches you a lot of stuff. I ended up having to leave at the start of a pandemic because I got tapped to lead a mobile development team for another project. But it's like you just grow a lot when you keep working through it as it says.

Next steps

What we've done already

- Responded to Brentwood's call for internships (to be included opportunities sent to students).
- Reviewed CVs of Applicants
- Emailed welcome letter requesting doodle filling out
- Analyzed availability for interns from Doodle
- Conducted Onboarding at a time that fit the most amount of candidates
- Provided [deck](#) shown during onboarding
- Invited interns at onboarding into our slack ([self invite](#))
- Wrote and sent acceptance letters

What will the next step in the application process be?

- Talk to us and each other via our [#internship Slack channel](#)
- Show up at the Kickoff and onboarding meeting.

What we can do better

- Sent this FAQ sooner
- Sent acceptance letters earlier
- Send the prework for developers: [Javascript part of FreeCodeCamp.org](#)
- Send invites to the Communities of Practice
- Communicated better and more often with Brentwood School
- Provided Bios of Hack for LA members that interns would meet during the AMA

What we will do to prepare for next year

- Have interns give feedback at the end of this year to be able to show to next year's prospective interns
- Develop calendar for running internship program
- Publish internship details (including this faq) on a dedicated internship page
- Add items to this list suggested by this year's interns
- Prepare the outreach materials for next year by evaluating what to reuse

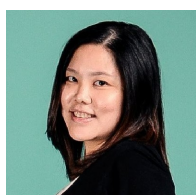
Bios



Bonnie Wolfe

Bonnie Wolfe is a serial tech entrepreneur, technical educator, speaker, community builder, software product manager, program manager and consultant. She had her first tech job at 16, started her first tech company by 20, and had her first tech company sale at 30. She has helped hundreds of clients transform their teams, processes and results.

As the current Executive Director of Hack for LA, she has grown the organization to the largest hack night series in the world with 20+ project teams, comprised of over 500 active participants globally, focusing solely on open source civic tech with projects from resources to fight food insecurity to a global catalog of civic tech open source projects. She is also the Pacific Regional Representative of Code for America's National Advisory Council where she spearheads a project to systematize the sharing of effective practices in civic tech, gov tech, edtech and related communities of interest.



Olivia Chiong

Olivia is a published author, productivity hacker and accidental activist. She pivoted into product management after over 15 years of project management experience in events, training and technology. Prior to joining Hack for LA, she was running her own small business consultancy, The UnBusy Entrepreneur,

focused on helping small business owners be more productive via automation and outsourcing. This led her to publish a book titled “Unbusy Entrepreneur – How to unlock your time and make more money” in 2015. A certified Professional Scrum Product Owner and Professional Scrum Master, Olivia's focus is ensuring teams can collaborate effectively and helping bring projects to market.



Ben Swerdlow

Ben is an AWS-certified Cloud Practitioner and Solutions Architect. He is a multiple-award winning coder, winning awards at both Hack USC and LA Hacks (USC and UCLA's Major League Hackathon conferences) while in high school. Ben is a longtime volunteer with HackLA, working his way up from the first high school participant as a freshman, to a project manager.

He then took a break from HackLA to serve on the development team for the World Health Organization Volunteer App Collective, where he quickly rose through the ranks to become co-client UI lead and an overall technical lead. He is currently working on his own in-cognito startup. Ben is a rising senior and is expected to graduate from Santa Monica High School in Spring 2022.



Pete Plass

Before making the switch to tech, Pete spent his early career in international development and education working in South Korea, Costa Rica and several other international locations. He has a Masters in International Education and currently works as a COVID-19 Subject Matter Expert for FEMA. This is his second year at Hack For LA. His interests

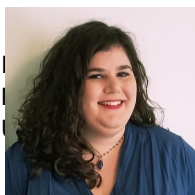
include backyard farming, video games, and aviation.



Dean Church

I have been with Hack for LA (HfLA) since May 2019. During my time within the HfLA community I have been a team member on many different projects. Roles that I have performed are MeetUp Greeter, Business Analyst, workshop facilitator, HackNight co-host, Project Manager, Product Owner, Scrum Master, and Technical Project Manager. I am currently enjoying my time with the

HfLA Fundraising Team learning how to apply for grants to support our awesome work! In my day job I work in the areas of Enterprise software development and Robotic Process Automation. In my spare time I tend a half dozen rose bushes and enjoy reading and researching the fields of Network Science and Project Management.



immer 2021



Sofia Alice

Sophia Alice is a data scientist with a mathematics degree from the University of Chicago. She has worked in education, real estate, and research. Currently working for CoreLogic as an Automation Engineer, she is also very active in the volunteer community, as a volunteer with HackforLA running the Data Science Community of Practice, and on the leadership team for Out In Tech.

