

What Confidentiality Looks Like in Practice

A quick guide for interns

Confidentiality isn't just about rules—it's about trust. In this work, people may share information, experiences, or materials because they believe they will be handled with care. This guide offers practical ways to think about confidentiality in day-to-day situations.

Additionally, when working with school districts, all communications (phone, email, text) are subject to the rules of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). This means that a reporter or any public citizen can request communications and records. Please discuss FOIA implications with your district host partner.

A simple way to think about it

Before sharing or using information, ask yourself:

Was this shared with me because of my role—and would someone be surprised or harmed if it traveled further?

If the answer is “yes” or “I’m not sure,” pause and check with your supervisor.

What usually *is* confidential

You should treat the following as private unless told otherwise:

- Personal stories, experiences, or opinions shared in meetings or conversations
- Names, contact information, or identifying details about students, staff, or community members
- Internal documents, drafts, notes, emails, or planning materials
- Observations from workshops, programs, or community spaces that weren't designed for public sharing

Even if something feels casual or informal, it may still be confidential.

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What confidentiality looks like day-to-day

In conversations

- Don't recap meetings or share stories with friends, partners, roommates, or classmates
- Avoid talking about internship work in public spaces (cafes, public transit, elevators)
- Use discretion even with people who work at the same institution but aren't part of the project

In writing and coursework

- Don't include names or identifying details in class assignments or reflections
- Use general descriptions instead of specific examples when reflecting on your work
- Ask before using internship experiences in presentations, papers, or portfolios

In digital spaces

- Don't screenshot, forward, or save internal documents unless asked
- Keep files in approved locations; avoid personal devices when possible
- Never post about people, meetings, or internal work on social media

Grey areas (very normal!)

Not everything is clearly labeled "confidential." When you're unsure:

- Ask your supervisor: *"Is this okay to share or include?"*
- Err on the side of protecting people and relationships
- Remember that learning includes asking for guidance

Uncertainty is part of ethical practice—checking in is a strength, not a mistake.

Using your internship experience

Your learning matters. You *can* talk about your internship in general ways, such as:

- Skills you're developing
- Topics or issues you're learning about
- The kind of work or field you're exploring

Just avoid sharing **specific people, stories, or internal processes** without permission.

If something doesn't feel right

If you encounter a situation that feels ethically unclear or uncomfortable:

- Talk with your supervisor or program contact as soon as possible
- You won't get in trouble for raising a concern in good faith
- Confidentiality includes caring for yourself, too

Bottom line

Confidentiality is about:

- Respecting trust
- Protecting people and relationships
- Acting with care, curiosity, and accountability

When in doubt: **pause, protect, and ask.**